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FINDING MARY IN A WORLD OF EVES:

St. Jerome's Discourse on the Feminine

A THESIS

The Honors Program

College of St. Benedict/St. John's University

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of the Requirements for the Distinction "All College Honors"
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In the Departments of English and History

by
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Finding Mary in a World of Eves

Once, women could speak.

Women played a large part in the development of early Christianity, although past historians have not recognized this. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza says that "the earliest Christians understood themselves as freed by the Spirit to a new life of egalitarian discipleship" and that "the earlier counterculture and later extraecclesial groups accepted women as equal members with equal responsibility and leadership" ("Word" 31). Despite the equality and freedom women attained at the beginning of Christianity, there is a good reason why historians have recurrently counted women out of early church history: they lost their power. "Grassroots" religion gave way to the "institutionalized... patriarchalization of the Christian community" (31). Female preachers and their religious groups lost out to orthodoxy which firmly stamped out female leadership. This paper focuses on how this happened by focusing on one man in particular: St. Jerome. The Church Fathers, early leaders within the church, wrote extensively on patriarchal church politics and contributed to the developing orthodox Catholic tradition, including women's position within that tradition. These men include St. Augustine of Hippo, author of Confessions and The City of God; St. Jerome, known for his letters and the Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible; St. Ambrose; and St. John Chrysostom. Along with many others, these men are important because their interpretations of Christian theology became part of the church doctrine. This exclusively constructed doctrine provides constant sources of reference for future scholars. These are the men that stamped out the early freedom of women.

After researching this subject, I have found that patristic writers often use the dichotomous figures of Eve and Mary to justify controlling and manipulating women. They compare women's nature to that of the sinful Eve, casting those women in a negative light. Hence, women are often read as embodying the role of Mary when attempting to avoid categorization as an Eve figure. Other Fathers may also

exhort these women to embrace a world of asexuality in order to further escape the category of Eve. The Church Fathers have these women at the mercy of the Eve/Mary dichotomy.

St. Jerome is one of many patristic writers who used his writings to perpetuate a patriarchy. Jerome produced a discourse about women that controls their conduct and defines their position within the church. I believe Jerome sets up a system of exclusive categories that undermines women's authority while augmenting his own. To do this, he needs to establish his own authority by successfully setting up a rhetorical self in his writings. Once he establishes his authority, he then sets up the polar female models, Eve and Mary; these models represent the only definitions Jerome makes available to women. By only giving them two models, Jerome claims that women's essential nature is either perfection--Mary--or sin--Eve. This is gender polarization. However, no woman can embody the perfect Mary, so women's inherent, essential nature is linked with sin, typified by Eve. The issues of authority, polarity and essentialism recur throughout my project.

When I started this research project, I wondered what business I had writing about the Church Fathers, specifically Jerome, and women in the fourth and fifth century. What help would this type of project be to the larger community? Would it just be a sterile academic endeavor done purely for its own sake? Does it speak to the present? While searching for answers to this question, I looked to my favorite philosopher and historian, Michel Foucault, and used two of his essays, "What Is an Author?" and "The Discourse on Language." These essays help bring this project into the present.

In the article, "What Is an Author?" Foucault discusses the function of an author; he sees certain authors as creators of discourse, creators of a way of thinking by creating a way of speaking. Jerome "authors" a discipline. Foucault states:

It is easy to see that in the sphere of discourse one can be the author of much more than a book--can be the author of a theory, tradition, discipline in which other books and authors will in their turn find a place. These authors are in a position which we shall call "transdiscursive." This is a recurring phenomenon--certainly as old as our civilization. Homer, Aristotle, and the Church Fathers, as well as the first mathematicians and the originators of the Hippocratic tradition, played this role. (Foucault 113)

The Church Fathers are "authors" of the Christian tradition. These authors speak with such authority and knowledge on their topic that later authors wishing to write within the same discipline must first acknowledge the Church Fathers. Giving them the title "father" indicates that these men have created an authoritative discourse which, in the future, will act as a reference point for others. Therefore, how they construct women within their discursive tradition is of vital importance to the future treatment of women within the Christian religious tradition.

In effect, the writings of Jerome and other Church Fathers have become ahistorical. Though their writings originated in a specific historical context, they have transcended that context. Just as Plato, Homer, Aristotle, Socrates, and others have leapt out of their own historical periods, so has Jerome. Therefore, one cannot argue that Jerome's writings are irrelevant to modern society. Rather, studying Jerome is necessary in order for us to understand the development of our own Christian culture and heritage.

From my standpoint, this project covers three different areas and links them together: the historical context of Jerome, his writings within that context, and the theories of Michel Foucault. I want to establish, in the context section, the world of early Christianity in late antique Rome, particularly the Roman and Christian views of sexuality. In order to make the connection between Christian views of sexuality and Christian views of women, it is necessary to see how they originated within Roman culture. It is also necessary to demonstrate women's participation in Christianity, to establish that they were a blossoming counterculture, one that the Church Fathers squashed. Although this project may at first necessitate a discussion of female response to a loss of power, I am only focusing on Jerome and how he contributes to that loss.

In the next section, using Foucault's notions of authoritative discourse, I explore Jerome's self-defined authority. The next section focuses on some specific prohibitions that Jerome delineates for women, primarily limitations of women's speech.

In the section on polar models, I explore at length the dichotomy of Eve and Mary, the two figures to whom the Church Fathers always compare women. In this dichotomy, it is necessary to discuss the link between Eve and sexuality because she becomes synonymous with sinful sex for both men and women.

At the heart of my argument is my discussion of gender essentialism. Jerome excludes women completely using a series of double binds that always tells them that they can only embody Eve.

I. Context

In the second century A.D., Roman society faced a population crisis. Peter Brown, professor of History at Princeton University, comments on this crisis in his book, The Body and Society: "Our book is set in a society that was more helplessly exposed to death than is even the most afflicted underdeveloped country in the modern world." The average life expectancy at birth for Romans in the second century A.D., he points out, was less than 25 years of age. An average of four out of ten men, and even fewer women, lived beyond fifty, and only the rich lived to this ripe old age. The pressure to reproduce was intense, especially for women. In order to maintain the population, every woman needed to have at least five children. Hence, "the median age of Roman girls at marriage may have been as low as fourteen. In North Africa, nearly 95 percent of the women recorded on gravestones had been married, over half before the age of 23" (Brown 6). Ancient Roman women led lives of relentless births and marriages to the point of death.

As a result of the Roman society, provided for marriage and procreation within its cultural value-system. Bachelors were fined (Brown 9), and vestal virgin priestesses "guarded the hearth of Rome that symbolized not only the Roman people but Roman male procreative power" (Kraemer 81). The Romans, as a whole, dedicated themselves to family and marriage.

A good marriage was a sign of a well-conducted life. If men could "harmonize" their home life, it then followed that their public life would also be harmonious (Brown 14). Brown states, "What makes the second century significant is the frequency with which the domestic concord associated with the nuclear family was played up symbolically, as part of public desire to emphasize the effortless harmony of the Roman order" (16). The Romans made their private married lives a visible part of their public lives, accepting marriage as a necessary part of life when controlled properly.

Not only did the Romans value marriage, but they also regarded sexual intercourse as an important part of that life. It was a necessary part of married life and, in moderation, also a sign of a

healthy social order. Unlike the early Christians, Romans did not fear or discourage sexual relations; they controlled them. When the Romans controlled their sexual urges, they enjoyed the fruits of a healthy family:

The married couple were encouraged to believe the act of intercourse itself, if conducted in right frame of mind--in effect, with decorum--would have a positive effect on character and the sex of the ensuing child, certainly that the neglect of such decorum misproduce offspring worthy of shame and pity. (Brown 20)

This statement illustrates the relationship between controlled sexual activity and a healthy family.

The advent of Christianity brought to the pagan world the notion of lifelong celibacy. Ascetic, celibate Jewish communities, like the Essenes and the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls, had existed before Christ. These celibate Jewish communities did not rebuke married life even though they did not approve of the pleasurable aspects of marriage. Christians, however, perfected chaste and celibate religious conduct. They turned it into a way of life.

The apostle Paul brought the radical Jewish heritage of celibacy and the Christian discipline over the body to the Roman world where sexual license was the norm. Sexually, Romans did what they pleased. For example, "fidelity to one's wife remained a personal option" (Brown 23), and homosexual brothels existed and were accepted as well. Because of this, Paul did not believe that Roman males controlled their sexuality; he thought they misused it. The Romans were too liberal, and Paul wanted to rid the Roman world of this sexual misconduct:

In the communities that Paul had founded, body...was to enjoy none of the carefree moments the indeterminacy allowed to it by the pagans. (Brown 51)

The Church Fathers further developed this ascetic attitude toward the body.

One might well ask, why did Christians, the Church Fathers in particular, develop this attitude? The answers may be many and convoluted, but I, for the most part, think they wanted to establish themselves as a community. Paul, and other early Christians, needed to define Christianity against the backdrop of Roman society; they needed to distinguish themselves from the overwhelming Roman world-

view. "Sexual sins cluttered the foreground" (Brown 51), and Paul of Tarsus was disgusted with the Roman world. Hence, he focuses on the sexual sins of the Romans. Christians wanted to separate themselves from "the promiscuity, public nudity, and homosexual love allowed to young males in pagan cities..." (Brown 40). It was from these sins that Paul tried to cleave Christianity. He succeeded. With Christianity came the persecution of male and female sexual offenders, such as prostitutes and homosexuals (Brown 383). In order to create a Christian world, Paul needed to discredit the old, Roman viewpoint. One cannot establish an authoritative world view without first rejecting the competition.

The Church Fathers also needed to establish a definition of Christianity three to four centuries later. The Fathers were writing down doctrine in order to create a solid identity for themselves, so they "authored" their own tradition. After three or four centuries of heresies, persecution, splinter groups, power struggles, and general religious chaos, the Church Fathers needed to establish a solid definition of Christianity. They needed to develop a category labelled CHRISTIANITY, one that would include what they wanted it to include--celibacy--and exclude what they did not want--sexuality. As a result, they created a system of inclusive and exclusive discourse and called it the Church.

Women did make up a large part of early Christian society, but it is debatable whether or not that participation was disproportionately large. Ross Kraemer points out that "the pagan critic Celsus denigrated Christianity in the second century C.E. as a religion of women, children, and slaves..." (128).

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza believes that

women who had experienced the gracious goodness Jesus' God were leaders in expanding the Jesus movement in Galilee and in developing a theological argument from the traditions for why pagans should have access to the power of Jesus' God and a share in the superabundance of the messianic table community. (In Memory 138)

Whether or not women made up the majority of early Christians, they certainly played a significant role as converts and converters.

The intense pressure on women to reproduce and their low life expectancy may have led them to adopt the lifelong virginity offered by the newly developing Christian community. I think this is

perhaps one reason why women turned to Christianity. They could escape the dangerous pressures of marriage and childbirth through Christianity for their entire lives, unlike pagan women. Brown points out the pain of married life:

It was left to Christian treatises on virginity to speak in public on the physical state of the married woman--on their danger in childbirth, on the pain in their breasts during suckling, on their exposure to children's infections, on the terrible shame of infertility, and on the humiliation of being replaced in their husband's affections. (25)

The Christian virgins refused marriage at any time. Widows also refrained from remarriage, dedicating the rest of their lives to God. The church even encouraged married couples to abstain from sexual intercourse in the name of their religion.

From the above evidence, the dangers of marriage and childbirth provide ample reason for Christian women to embrace heartily a nonsexual life. Combined with that, women may have picked up on a religious trend used by many other past and future religious figures and institutions: the retreat. The Essenes, Mohammed, Monks, and Jesus Christ all retreated from society for religious purposes. Women also retreated, and a new religious life made it that much easier to abandon their marital and maternal duties. Husbands and children made retreat impossible in the first place.

The Millenarian aspect of the very early church also propelled women toward the celibate nature of Christianity:

For women, this constellation of intense convictions that the end of the world was at hand and that marriage, childbearing, and the transmission of property from one generation to the next were consequently no longer of any concern had major ramifications. (Kraemer 139)

If the end was at hand, women obviously had no need for marriage. However, the immediate end was not at hand, and this fact, unfortunately, played directly into the hands of the Church Fathers, making it easier for them to demand lifelong celibacy for a later judgment.

Even though these women may have chosen Christianity in order to "liberate" themselves from the arduous life of marriage, they still confronted the problem of a male-dominated social order. The Church Fathers took an instrumental role in reasserting authority over this new group of women. They

developed their own language of exclusion and authority within Christianity which set the precedent for future religious discourses about women. The Church Fathers successfully squashed the liberation that women had tried to gain by choosing celibacy and the religious life. What was once a chance for freedom became subordinate to a patriarchy.

In the midst of this social upheaval was St. Jerome. He was born around 345 A.D., a few years after the death of the great Roman Emperor Constantine, and he died on September 20, 420 A.D. Jerome serves as an excellent source for this examination not only because he is prolific--historians have recovered 150 of his letters and many of his scriptural treatises--but his audience consists primarily of women. His closest friends were members of female "monastic groups." Since no formal convents or monasteries existed at this time, these women are most often referred to as virgins, although many were widows, and some were even married. Nevertheless, they all grouped themselves together based on their adherence to celibacy. They devoted their lives to Christ and the preservation of virginity/celibacy. The theory was that asceticism brought one closer to God. In this endeavor, Jerome served as their spiritual guide.

Jerome's closest female friend was Paula, a widow and mother of two other of Jerome's "friends": Eustochium and Blaesilla. He writes his famous Letter 22 to Eustochium, laying down in great detail the "laws" of virginity. He also often writes to the sisters, Marcella and Asella. Marcella is a widow devoted to celibacy and Asella is a virgin, officially consecrated thus at the age of ten. Jerome often praises Asella's asceticism and virginal devotion, using her as a model for other women.

Jerome lived in a world full of classical traditions and natal Christian development. It is in this world that Jerome relates to his female "friends." It is in this world that Jerome develops his attitudes toward women. It is in this world that Jerome establishes his authority.

II. Authority

Jerome and the Church Fathers construct women within the framework of the Christian tradition, a Christian tradition they wrote, constructed, or "authored." In this project, his authorial or rhetorical personality will be my main concern; to examine his rhetorical personality, I am using Foucault's essay, "What Is an Author?". As an author, Jerome assumes much authority. When he creates a discourse, he exerts power over those he encloses within that discourse.

Foucault is always interested in how power moves through discourse. He does not ask "what is power?" Rather, he asks "how does power work within this situation, this context?" In his essay, "The Discourse on Language," Foucault maps methods of exclusive discourse, language that provides a framework through which one can exclude others. The discourses of the Church Fathers, for example, shape and control women through language. Jerome always claims "the privileged or exclusive right to speak of a particular object" (Foucault 216), and uses exclusive devices like gender essentialism and polar models to categorize and exclude women to prohibit their speech, movement, etc.

If one can control and categorize others in language, one has "awesome" power:

I am supposing that in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and its dangers, to cope with chance events, to evade its ponderous, awesome materiality. (216)

Here Foucault refers to discourse created in reaction to surrounding events. He establishes context for discourse, implying that control of discourse varies for each historical period. For example, part of the context for the discourses of the Church Fathers regarding virginity may have sprung out of Rome's population crisis. The Romans gave power to those who were married in order to perpetuate that type of social order. The Church Fathers attach power to celibacy in order to perpetuate male control over women's sexuality. Jerome gives himself the exclusive right to tell women how to conduct their sexual lives.

Foucault focuses, in this essay, on how strategies of exclusion sharpen the definition of power

within a given social order. These "strategies," for the most part, include methods of limitation. For example, disciplines and institutions are limiting structures. Categorizing language into disciplines or institutions, like theology or the church, limits the scope of discourse. Once the title of "theology," for example, is used to categorize something, it implies that a certain set of ideas exist that pertain to that specific category, and any other set of ideas is excluded from the discourse of "theology." Creating disciplines allows an author to construct or write, if you will, but the constructs are immediately limited because of the discipline.

In "The Discourse on Language," Foucault also often writes about power relations and how they are used within certain historical contexts. The Church Fathers, in the context of the fourth and fifth centuries, wrote from positions of power. They assumed enough authority to establish correct rules of orthodoxy, Christian conduct, and scriptural interpretation. St. Jerome was, of course, among these Fathers. For Jerome, every letter is an occasion to instruct, to assert his authority.

Obviously, Jerome needs authority in order to categorize women. Jerome, in his writings, establishes a rhetorical style, one that conveys his sense of his own authority. Jerome sets up his privileged right to speak; he bases his privileged right to speak on three factors: scripture, personal purity, and education.

Like many other Church Fathers, Jerome grounds his authority in a "selective appeal to the Bible" (Clark, Women 15). He picks and chooses what needs emphasis and ignores all else. He often quotes out of context and repeats certain sections more than once. Like many other Church Fathers, Jerome forgets that there are two creation stories in Genesis, and in the first one, God creates both man and woman in his image. One never hears of this story in patristic writings. All of the Fathers concentrate on the second creation story, where Eve is made from Adam's rib, destined to be nothing but his helpmate forever. In additions to Genesis 2 and 3, some of Jerome's other favorites include I Corinthians, and I Timothy. He frequently quotes this advice: "It is better to marry than to burn" (I Cor.

7:9). These sections, when interpreted selectively by Jerome, reinforce his conclusions about religious life and serve as a basis for criticism and reform.

For instance, Jerome interprets marriage and the family life in the Old Testament in his own way.

He claims that

the old law had a different ideal of blessedness, for therein it said: "Blessed is he who hath seed in Zion and a family in Jerusalem:" (Isa. xxxi. 9, LXX) and "Cursed is the barren who beareth not:" (Isa. lxi. 1, LXX) and "Thy children shall be like olive-plants round about thy table." (Ps. cxxviii. 3) (Jerome 30)

This group of quotations seems to favor marriage and children. However, Jerome goes on to say that marriage and family life was only acceptable because the world needed people. He claims that now that the world has enough people, the Christian community should abandon marriage (30). Thus, Jerome bends Scripture to fit his notions of religious life.

Jerome also lards his writings with so many biblical citations that he railroads his audience into believing him. For example, in one of Jerome's letters, he chastises the "Virgins of Aemona" for not writing to him. However, he forgives them because scripture says he should. He then goes on to cite numerous examples of unconditional forgiveness from the Bible (Jerome 12). Jerome does not stop at forgiveness; he also assaults readers with barrages of quotations regarding food, celibacy, marriage, and wealth, to name a few others. Jerome proves himself quite adept at merging his writings with the Bible. He so overwhelms his letters with biblical quotation after biblical quotation that he blurs the distinctions between HIS authoritative text (his letters) and THE authoritative text (the Bible).

Jerome also grounds his discursive authority in constant references to himself as an exemplary model of Christian virtue. Others who seek to gain the same virtue must abide by Jerome's self-established authority. This immediately sets up a prohibitive discourse, in that Jerome's idea of virtue becomes the model; all else is subject to his disapproval and denunciation. Jerome excludes those who do not abide by his definition of virtue. In the following sections, I will specifically develop Jerome's particular sense of virtue.

Unlike St. Augustine, who admits to many sins, Jerome is seldom, if ever, prone to self-recriminations. If he does admit to wrongful conduct, it is usually extremely benign instances. For example, he once admits to reading and liking too much pagan literature. Of course, he also remarks that he has since reformed (35-36). In another instance, he chastises himself for speaking so highly of a widow that he makes her seem more virtuous than a virgin (42). Because his personal Christian philosophy has always put virgins above widows in the hierarchy of holiness, Jerome merely defends himself to himself. This is definitely not a repentant St. Augustine speaking here!

Jerome's didactic bent also comes from his assumption that he is learned enough and pure enough to give advice. He prefaces many of his letters with disclaimers defending his virtue and humility. Whenever others criticize him, Jerome always responds with strenuous denials, explanations of his misinterpreted intentions, and examples of his model conduct. Sometimes he insults those who dare argue against him. Jerome makes a strong point not to allow anyone to think he is ever in the wrong. For example, when others criticize Jerome's relationships with Paula and Eustochium and call his purity into question, Jerome loudly protests:

It often happened that I found myself surrounded by virgins, and to some of these I expounded the divine books as best I could. If they have ever seen anything in my conduct unbecoming a Christian let them say so. Have I taken any one's money? Have I not disdained all gifts, whether small or great? Has the chink of any one's coin been heard in my hand? Has my language been equivocal, or my eye wanton? No.... (59)

Jerome even goes so far as to accuse those who oppose him of lustful and decadent natures. He states, "We, on our side, look with disfavor on such life as yours. You can fatten yourself on your good things as much as you please; I for my part prefer paleness and emaciation" (59). He pits them against himself and his self-imposed notions of purity.

Jerome also promotes education as a basis for authority, another form of prohibitive discourse. Only those who have been educated have the authority to advise others. To do this, Jerome defines the limit and extent of the education of

his followers. Education, to Jerome, does not merely include knowledge of Latin, Greek, and the Scriptures; it also implies a goal, and that goal is to be a good, ascetic Christian.

While the women with whom Jerome corresponded were extremely well-educated, he had specific intentions regarding female education. Clark suggests that

it is clear that Jerome expected his female correspondents to be thoroughly familiar with the Old and New Testaments; his letters to women are in fact educational devices for Scriptural instruction. (Clark, Jerome 76)

Even though Jerome did encourage women to learn, it seems that men still had a broader education that contained more Classical, pagan studies (74).

Jerome decides what constitutes a good education for women and what does not. For example, Marcella often engaged in scriptural arguments with Jerome, and she knew Greek and Latin. Likewise, Paula knew these languages and was also reputed to speak Hebrew with a perfect accent (Brown 369). Jerome applauds this, but with the proverbial grain of salt.

He chastises these women for their classical knowledge, admonishing his female audience to only study the "sacred pages" (28). If a woman "studies the works of men who 'neglect the faith' she should do so only in order to criticize them" (Clark, Jerome 73). For example, there are over 300 quotations and references to scripture in Letter 22 and only six allusions to classical works (76). It is clear that Jerome means for women's education, like men's, to emphasize thorough familiarity with the Bible.

III. The Strategy

Silence the Enemy: Exercises in Prohibition

During the time of Jerome, many of the Church Fathers and members of the clergy established rules and patterns of orthodoxy within the infant religion of Christianity. Many different interpretations of the nature of Christianity existed during this formative period. Unfortunately, during the search for a constant Christian identity, women who had attained a certain level of authority within some Christian splinter groups lost their positions when their particular group was categorized as heretical (Clark, Women 20).

Two early Christian sects, later deemed heretical, that allowed women to preach were the Montanists and the Gnostics. In these groups, women "participated in church leadership, not only as widows and deaconesses, but also as prophets and teachers. Women actually dared 'to teach, to debate, to exorcise, to promise cures, probably even to baptize' " (Fiorenza 51). The Montanists allowed women to prophesy, and the Gnostics acknowledged female disciples of Christ in their canon (51). However, "mainstream Christianity attempted to downplay the significance of women disciples and concentrate on figures like Peter and Paul and the Twelve" (51-52). This was unfortunate for the Montanists because, "despite their basic doctrinal orthodoxy," the stigma of having female leaders led to their ultimate rejection by the mainstream church (42). Unfortunately, subscribing to these "enlightened" Christian sects only hurt women's religious authority in the end.

At the same time, even the greatest amount of orthodox scriptural study could not lead women to clerical positions. Women could not become priests. They also could not teach, "ostensibly because Eve once proved herself a bad teacher to Adam" (Clark, Women 23). Ultimately, then, Jerome does not praise educated women so that they can become leaders in the church. Rather, he uses his power over education to help women lead the lives he wants them to, lives on the path to ascetic purity. Peter Brown suggests:

That Jerome did not encourage women to become theological authors in their own right meant no more than that he, like all other late antique males, wished to keep for himself the dubious privilege of being aggressive to other men. (370)

As I shall point out later, this attitude let Jerome cut off women's right to speak.

Keeping women out of positions of power also allowed the Fathers to achieve a patriarchal world order. Although the Church Fathers wanted to establish themselves as a separate and unique community, they also may have felt the need to reassert male authority in a chaotic society and return to the ordered society of the pre-Christian, non-Roman world:

When the Fathers cite Biblical verses depicting Jesus' twelve male disciples as a justification for an all-male priesthood, we see that they are appealing to the norms of Palestinian Judaism as a sanction for the practices of later Christian churches in the larger Graeco-Roman world. (Clark, Women 21)

They are also setting up their own authority over Biblical scripture, as Jerome does.

However, Jerome does more than deny women clerical positions; he polices their every move. He does this primarily by limiting women's right to speak. To control speech, as Foucault notes, is to control others. He states:

In a society such as our own, we all know the rules of exclusion. The most obvious and familiar of these concerns what is prohibited. We know perfectly well that we are not free to say just anything, that we cannot simply speak of anything, when we like or where we like; not just anyone, finally, may speak of just anything. (Foucault, "The Discourse" 216).

Jerome prohibits women's speech in many different ways, employing indirect strategies.

A first indirect prohibition of speech is the limitation of women's movement. Women should stay home and pray in silence to "the Bridegroom." He says:

Go not from home nor visit the daughters of a strange land, though you have patriarchs for brothers and Israel for a father.... The Bridegroom cannot be found in the streets.... Jesus is jealous. He does not choose that your face should be seen by others. (Jerome 32)

Those women who do travel are foolhardy and unworthy virgins:

Let foolish virgins stray abroad, but for your part stay at home with the Bridegroom; for if you shut your door, and, according to the precept of the Gospel, pray to your Father in secret, He will come and knock.... (33)

By limiting women's movement and advocating silent seclusion, Jerome prohibits women from speaking freely. This allows him to speak for women since they have no legitimate speech of their own.

Jerome also limits the company women should keep. He prohibits virgins from keeping company with married and wealthy women: "Do not court the company of married ladies or visit the houses of the high-born. Do not look too often on the life which you despised to become a virgin" (27). Not only does Jerome advise against associating with these women, he questions any motivation to do so: "Why do you, God's bride, hasten to visit the wife of a mere man?" (28). According to Jerome, every woman belongs to Christ; she is his bride. Money and mere men mean nothing. If this is so, why even associate with married and wealthy women?

Jerome also advises his female followers to "keep with you bands of virgins; and let your consolers be of your own sex" (Jerome 167). Not only should women avoid married women, but also men. If Jerome keeps women away from men, he increases his ability to limit their sexual activity as well as their speech. Also, when women keep themselves cloistered, Jerome becomes the only male authority figure, outside of the Bridegroom, that can counsel them.

The last major group that Jerome does not want his women speaking to are those he calls "false" ascetics. These false ascetics are those widows and virgins who do not abide by Jerome's concepts of virtue. He tells his celibate followers to "shun those who are widows from necessity and not from choice. Not that they ought to have desired the death of their husbands; but that they have not welcomed the opportunity of continence when it has come" (28). If Jerome allows his followers to fraternize with women who do not conform to his ideas of celibacy, he compromises his own authority. Therefore, he prohibits his followers from speaking to these "evil pretenders" (28).

Bodies in Transcendence: The Move from Polarity to

Essentialism

In order to justify the prohibitions mentioned in the previous section, Jerome delineates some extremely limiting ideas about the basic nature of women. He limits them to one of two possible categories: Eve or Mary. This polarity represents Jerome's primary method of exclusion. Categorizing women as either Eve or Mary gives women little room to breathe. This polarity also assumes that Jerome believes that women cannot, essentially, be anything other than Eve or Mary.

Other Church Fathers also employed the polar positions of Eve and Mary in order to define and limit the Christian view of women. When classifying women, the Church Fathers resort to exploiting what they considered women's basic nature--sexuality. This connection goes all the way back to Genesis 3 and Eve's responsibility for the entrance of sin into the world, a point with which the Church Fathers all agreed (Clark, Women 38).

To earlier Church Fathers, those writing before Jerome, Eve's waywardness was described in terms of obedience, or lack thereof. Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons around 185 A.D., says this of Eve in his treatise, Against Heresies:

Eve, having become disobedient, was made the cause of death both for herself and for all the human race. Thus also Mary had a husband selected for her and nonetheless was a virgin, yet by her obedience she was made the cause of salvation both for herself and for all the human race. (Clark, Women 38)

Here Irenaeus sets up the polar figures of Eve and the Virgin Mary based on the model of obedience. Eve destroys and Mary saves.

The Fathers also agreed that because Eve was fully responsible for sin, she should forever suffer for her transgression under the yoke of subservience (Clark, Women 41). John Chrysostom concurs in his Homily 26 on I Corinthians, saying that "whatever the inferior position of woman at creation, she was subjected to the man chiefly because of her role in the first sin" (42). The Fathers do not characterize Adam as a sexual figure, but Eve suffers more because of her unfortunate sexual connotations.

The Church Fathers also concentrated heavily on the nature of sexual functions within Christianity, and most agreed that sex was something best avoided. Even before the Church Fathers, the early Desert Fathers desperately tried to move beyond the body and its inherent evils, including sexuality. Early Christian sects, such as the followers of Origen, the Gnostics, and the Manichaeans, also emphasized the evil nature of the body, which led to the rejection of sex, a sin of the flesh.

To Gnostics, the body was a catastrophic trap, one that could blow up when misused:

To have intercourse was to open the human body to the firestorm that raged through the universe. Sexual desire was made to stand out in sharp relief as an enduring feature of the unredeemed human person.... (Brown 116)

The connection between the body and sexuality was an explosive one to the Gnostics. Mani and the Manichaeans were not quite as harsh as the Gnostics, but they still believed to some extent that "in itself, the body was a lost cause." However, "the bodies of the believers, if kept holy by continence, could play a role in nothing less than the redemption of the universe" (Brown 198). Finally, there is Origen, who also believed that the body presented a dangerous challenge to Christians--dangerous enough to warrant transcendence of "the present limits of the self..." (164). It follows from these philosophies that Eve, always representative of sin and the fall of man, becomes representative of sexuality because sexuality in the chaotic early church was often associated with the corruptible and fallible body.

Eve, then, becomes the foremost figure of sexuality within the Church. The Church Fathers associated Eve with more than just sexuality, but with seduction and lust-- "unholy" sexuality. Augustine connects Eve's introduction of sin into the world with the introduction of lust. In the City of God, "Augustine believed that lust, so irrational in its expression, would not have existed in Paradise had the sin not been committed..." (Clark, Women 44). Anything of the body, like lust or other sexual expression, was considered "irrational." Therefore, rejecting Eve became necessary when rejecting sexuality.

Jerome also sees Eve representing seduction and lust. This is best explained by Jerome's views

of marriage and celibacy. The marriage vs. abstinence argument best represents the purest manifestation of Jerome's depiction of the Eve/Mary dichotomy. Jerome constantly denigrates marriage to promote celibacy. For example, in his treatise, Against Jovinian, he is "so sarcastic, so derogatory of marriage that his friends attempted to remove this book from publication" (Clark, Women 126). Even more than other Church Fathers, Jerome nearly always equates marriage with Eve and her evil sexual nature. As payment for her terrible sins, God gave Eve and her descendents the burden of a purely sexual life replete with subservient wifely positions and episodes of painful childbirth. Such was a women's deserved lot. According to Jerome, then, women could only circumvent this fate by denying their sexuality.

Jerome sets up his connection between Eve and marriage in this statement:

In Paradise Eve was a virgin, and it was only after the coats of skins that she began her married life.... Virginity is natural while wedlock only follows guilt, what is born of wedlock is virgin flesh, and it gives back in fruit what in root it has lost. (Jerome 35)

Jerome, in this statement, specifically calls virginity a natural state, whereas marriage is merely base, sexual punishment for the sins of Eve.

Following the polar model, Jerome posits Mary at the other end of the scale as the champion of virginity and abstinence. Eve and Mary become the symbolic representations of marriage and celibacy. Marriage and Eve are equated with sex which in turn is equated with sin and temptation, celibacy and Mary with purity and spirituality. Mary represents all that is pure, compassionate, good, and sexless. Jerome states, "Set before you the blessed Mary, whose surpassing purity made her meet to be the mother of the Lord" (39). Jerome's methods of exclusion continue.

Eve provides an effective negative association to an institution Jerome believes is inferior. Equating marriage with Eve leads Jerome also to equate marriage with sin and then with death. He constantly refers to marriage as death, i.e. that married women will never truly live in Christ as all Christians should. Death to Jerome means that those who deny celibacy will not have life after death; they just die. He tells the wealthy widow Furia, a woman Jerome did not know personally, to "think

every day that you must die and you will then never think of marrying again" (109). He also quotes from I Timothy 5:6 to support his viewpoint: "A widow 'that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth'" (166). When Jerome says that "death came through Eve, but life has come through Mary" (Jerome 42), he supports his constructed sexual dichotomy, forces women to try to move beyond their sex, and reduces them to mere shadows of Eve and Mary.

Because he cannot reject it outright, Jerome instead presents marriage as a pitiable tradition and a consolation prize for those who cannot abide by the laws of celibacy. As I noted, he quotes several times from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "It is better to marry than to burn" (I Cor. 7:9). Sometimes Jerome even speaks of marriage as being only one step away from prostitution: "In other words, it is preferable that she should prostitute herself to one rather than to many" (Jerome 70). In another letter, he sneers at second marriages in much the same way, "What must a second marriage be if it is looked on merely as an alternative to a brothel!" (168). Marriage as a form of prostitution makes for an interesting sexual metaphor.

Jerome also uses Paul to support his view that marriage is merely a societal formality: "Thus Jerome informs his correspondents that Paul in I Corinthians 7 had advised couples to stay together because he hoped that the wife would be transformed into a sister" (Clark, Jerome 55). Marriage exists either to protect those who cannot control their sexual drives or as a traditional formality that should be abandoned in favor of celibacy.

Jerome's anti-marriage stance is extremely harsh, and it alarmed many of his contemporaries, like St. Augustine and St. Ambrose. To avoid total heresy, Jerome does have to acknowledge that Scripture supports marriage. The only argument for marriage that Jerome finds suitable in the Old Testament is that the world was yet unpeopled so it needed procreative action (Jerome 30). I think Jerome would dearly love to say that marriage is no longer needed in his time; however, he again has to keep one foot in the world of reality, so he grudgingly supports marriage, but "only because they [married women]

gave me virgins" (30).

Jerome even denigrates the status of motherhood, another of Eve's burdens. When he writes to Paula regarding her daughter's death, he tells her that too much devotion to children is lack of devotion to God (Jerome 53). Jerome's letter of consolation to Paula instructs more than it consoles. It ends with Jerome telling Paula not to "grieve overmuch" for Blaesilla. And Paula, in the end, does take Jerome's instructions to heart: she abandons all of her children in order to preside over a religious community in Bethlehem.

When Jerome demeans motherhood, he attacks it with regard to the body as well. In one letter, he describes the birthing process as a vile and evil occurrence. Amazingly enough, however, Jerome is describing Christ's birth! He says, "Nine months He awaits His birth in the womb, undergoes the most revolting conditions, and comes forth covered with blood, to be swathed in rags and covered with caresses" (40). Even the virgin Mary cannot escape the vile taint that links motherhood to the evil body. She cannot escape a physical female form, and this links her inextricably to the fleshly Eve.

Interestingly enough, Jerome rarely, if ever, discusses Mary as a married woman, although she obviously was, as the story goes. There is a gap in Jerome's writings. He, for the most part, ignores Mary's married status, unless he speaks in terms of a spiritual marriage to God. Joseph might as well not exist. Jerome implies, by this gap, that by following Eve, one will end up married to man, a tainted bond at best, and following Mary will inspire other women to wed themselves to the "Bridegroom," a truly spiritual existence.

Hence Eve, via her discursive position as a married woman, represents the female body which Jerome finds problematic. Not only does he preach virginity, but he also believes in asceticism. Asceticism, to Jerome, means denying the body. To him, the body has become a metaphor for evil, an institution of greed; consequently, Jerome constructs a dichotomy of flesh and spirit. Again, Jerome creates a discourse based on exclusion. Not only must the ascetics exclude from their lives food, sexual

pleasures, etc., but those who do not are excluded from "true" Christianity. Virginity and abstinence as method and doctrine rise out of this language of exclusion. Hence, women's salvation is based entirely on a context of exclusion.

The Move to Essentialism

Virginity, not marriage or motherhood, is obviously the desired state. Jerome manipulates the polarity of these two female states, moving women toward the example of the virginal Mary:

A mother before she was wedded, she remained a virgin after bearing her son. Therefore, as I was going to say, the virgin Christ and the virgin Mary have dedicated in themselves the first fruits of virginity for both sexes. (79)

Mary becomes, to Jerome, the savior of celibacy. Only through her can women escape the vile sexual nature that is Eve: "Death came through Eve, but life had come through Mary. And thus the rich gifts of virginity had been bestowed most richly upon women, seeing that it had its beginning from a woman" (30). Virginity, then, based on this model of Mary, becomes a natural and desired state. Jerome believes that celibacy is natural, and marriage is only necessary because it brings about virgins.

Having Mary as the model for Christian women puts women at an extreme disadvantage: she is an impossible model. Not only is she a virgin, but she is also a mother and a wife, all the while maintaining her virginity. Using the dichotomy of Eve and Mary, Jerome strategically excludes all women from any positive model. He wishes all women to abide by nature and live a life of asceticism, but his model of celibacy is unattainable because no woman could possibly be a virgin mother. By creating and then collapsing his own polarJerome's model becomes a type of gender essentialism. He has successfully displaced the female, putting her in a position of constant exclusion.

Let me explain. I have shown that throughout his writings, Jerome has set up an Eve/Mary dichotomy. He suggests that he can help women transcend their "Eveness" by giving them access to Mary. However, there is no possible access to Mary, so women, according to Jerome, can only "essentially" be Eve. This is my thesis: Jerome creates an impossible category for women which decreases their authority and increases his own.

When Jerome claims that women should only essentially be like Mary, but really implies that they only can be like Eve, he gives himself a basis for criticism and instruction. To be a good Christian, one

cannot be Eve. The only other alternative is Mary, but women can never really be like her, either. He puts women into a double bind that he can control. This double bind provides Jerome with ultimate power because he decides which women he can exclude from this category at his liberty.

For example, to any woman who does not conform to his standard of the virtuous Mary, he invokes threatening images of Eve, cowing them into submission. In one letter, Jerome uses suggestive snake metaphors: "Beware of nurses and waiting maids and similar venomous creatures..." (103) and women with "their faces painted, their eyes like those ovipers..." (104). Of women he does deem worthy, he promises rewards in the name of Mary: "What will be the glory of that day when Mary, the mother of the Lord, shall come to meet you, accompanied by her virgin choirs!" (41). Because Jerome limits the scope of women's roles in Christianity to two, he can criticize more often and with legitimacy, for no woman under Jerome's tutelage would want to "do violence to nature" (48), i.e. virginity. He can extend his criticism even further when he collapses the two models into one--Eve.

Jerome derives authority over women from "pedestal politics," a manipulation of women's singular position. He places celibate widows and virgins on pedestals and believes them to be the paramount models of Christian virtue. Inevitably, however, all women slide off the slippery surface of the pedestal because the ideal position is impossible to sustain. When Jerome elevates these ascetic women over all others, he gives them a false sense of authority. He says to his chaste followers, "learn in this a holy pride; know that you are better than they" (28). He again exalts his favored few in this statement:

It is because they [heretical women] know that the name virgin brings glory with it, that they go about as wolves in sheep's clothing. As antichrist pretends to be Christ, such [false] virgin assume an honorable name, that they may the better cloak a discreditable life; rejoice, my sister; rejoice, my daughter; rejoice, my virgin; for you have resolved to be, in reality, that which others insincerely feign. (39)

After obsequious praise such as this, Jerome can, because he is the author of his followers' authority, tell them how to conform to his model. He assures that these women will heed his lectures because who would disregard the man who elevates certain women to a higher level of spiritual power? Only if the

widows and virgins follow Jerome's rules will they win a position on his pedestal. Perhaps this is why many women followed Jerome. He gave them a false sense of power.

Jerome controls, defines, and limits the authority he gives to certain women. Because he is the author and "justifier" of this authority, he reinforces his own. The women who seemingly benefit from his benevolent authority are forever within Jerome's enclosed discourse because he "makes the rules." In order to maintain their elevated status, virgins and widows must be "thin and pale with fasting," subject to their parents' authority, silent, chaste, confined to their chambers, and in the presence of women only (28). He constructs a specific pedestal, and only those who conform to it will benefit.

Jerome constantly cites examples of those women he thinks have met his required standards and then further exalts their status. He makes them the models of Christian celibacy among the chaste. When he does this, he reinforces his own authority once again. In a particularly pompous moment, Jerome states, "Let no one blame my letters for the eulogies and censures which are contained in them. To arraign sinners is to admonish those in like case, and to praise the virtuous is to quicken the zeal of those who wish to do right" (42). He is the teacher, the rule-maker, and he uses those who diligently follow his teachings to prove this point.

For example, he lauds the virgin Asella, who committed herself to the chaste, ascetic life when she was but ten years old (42). In a letter to Asella's sister, Marcella, Jerome makes sure he points out all of Asella's remarkable virtues. Not surprisingly, they all match the guidelines of celibacy and ascetic devotion that Jerome specified in a previous letter. Asella fasts, lives in solitude, rarely ever speaks to men, never goes abroad, and spends her time praying to the "Bridegroom" (43). She is a model to all: "Let widows and virgins imitate her, let wedded wives make much of her, let sinful women fear her, and let Bishops look up to her" (43). Jerome even extends the example of her virtuous achievements to clergymen! Because Asella follows Jerome's dictates, she takes her place on the his constructed pedestal.

Blaesilla, the daughter of Paula, is another of Jerome's model women. She, unlike the virgin

Asella, is a widow. Blaesilla's husband dies after only seven months of marriage (47). Although Jerome laments the fact that Blaesilla did not become a consecrated virgin, he is comforted knowing that he persuaded her to fulfill the "second degree of chastity," i.e., a chaste widow. He praises her new devotion to asceticism--her fervent and frequent prayers, her plain appearance (48). Jerome takes on heroic status regarding Blaesilla: he believes himself to be the one who rescued her from the horror of remarriage.

Jerome's belief is furthered when Blaesilla dies three months after her ascetic conversion. He revels in the fact that Blaesilla died a better Christian and that he played a significant role in her conversion. He calls himself "her father in spirit, her foster-father in affection" (49) and is relieved that he got to her spiritual needs in the nick of time, as it were. He says this of Blaesilla:

Had she been cut off (as I pray none may be) while her thoughts were full of worldly desires and passing pleasures, then mourning would indeed have been her due, and no tears shed for her would have been too many. As it is, by the mercy of Christ she, four months ago, renewed her baptism in her vow of widowhood, and for the rest of her days spurned the world, and thought only of the religious life. (51)

She becomes a model for conversion and a testimonial to Jerome's spiritual heroism. According to Jerome, it is never too late to convert to his model of Christianity.

Through death, Blaesilla achieved a spiritual, and symbolic transcendence. However, women should transcend their natures while they are alive in order to further rectify the problem of women's essential natures and the Eve/Mary polarity. To do this, Jerome extends transcendence to the entire body. Jerome believes that "men and women were irreducibly sexual beings, and a constant source of temptation to each other" (Brown 376). Not only should women attempt to transcend their essential Eve natures, but they should transcend their bodies altogether. Jerome believes that women can transcend their sex by transcending their bodies. He was an ardent follower of Origen, who believed in the ability to spiritually transcend the flesh (Brown 373). Jerome deemed his female friends worthy of his attention because they "were seen as exemplifying the highest ideals of the Christian life; they could, in fact,

scarcely be called women at all, so far behind had they left the condition of femaleness with all its unfortunate connotations" (Clark, Jerome 48). Jerome had successfully advised these women to become more asexual.

Transcending sex meant more to Jerome than merely ascending to a higher spiritual plane; in order to become more masculine, women had to reject their femininity and their bodies. Jerome "contributed...heavily...to the definite sexualization of Paul's notion of the flesh. An unrelieved sense of sexual danger, lodged deep within the physical person, swallowed up all other meaning of the flesh..." (Brown 376-377). Jerome wants to prohibit all sexual expression, but I'm concentrating specifically on women who have an especially dangerous relation to sexuality, personified by Eve. Eve, in all of her sexual splendor, needed to be totally rejected so women could achieve spiritual transcendence. In this way, Jerome reinforces his Eve/Mary dichotomy. All women are Eve, and Eve is of the evil female body, so the female body must be rejected.

Interestingly, male sexuality does not provide as much of a problem for the early Christians. Certainly, there were plenty of celibate men, and there were also many men who worried about engaging in lustful acts of sex. However, men had power and their intellect to save them. But women did not have power and, according to men, did not have the capacity for reason that men did, so they had less sexual self-control. This merely illustrates the timeless dichotomy: men are rational animals, and women are sexual animals.

And Eve, the epitome of the sexual animal, enjoys the blame for all lustful acts, even those of men, because she is ultimately responsible for sin and lust. For this reason, men fear her--Jerome fears her. It follows, then, that Jerome should fear women in general because they, by default, must naturally associate themselves with Eve because they share the same body and have the same essential nature.

However, asceticism would take women out of their bodies and into the asexual realm of God: "If men and women could not learn to see each other as sexless creatures, as 'neither male nor female,

...[but] one in Christ Jesus,' in the most sacred places of the Christian world, where would they ever be able to do so?" (Brown 371). Jerome even remarks that:

The flesh always lusts after things of the flesh, and by its allurements draws the soul to partake of deadly pleasures; but it is for us Christians to restrain the desire for sensual indulgence by an intenser love for Christ. (192)

For example, he "salutes" the mothers of three of his friends "for they have triumphed over their sex and the world, and await the Bridegroom's coming" (10). To Jerome, Christ was put on earth in order to crucify "the flesh with its affections and lusts..." (40). Of Theodora, a continent married woman, Jerome praises her fellowship with his interpretation of Paul's letter: "Once a woman, but now a man, once an inferior but now an equal..." (56). Women who embrace asceticism can transcend their sex, and those who successfully transcend their sex improve their social status.

Transcending the body also has spiritual benefits. When women moderate and/or eliminate their intake of food, drink, and sexual activity, they can achieve a spiritual equality with men: "Fasting and Sunday eucharist were what everyone had in common" (Bynum 33). However, fasting can only give women limited equality; it cannot divest them of their female bodies, although Jerome did try hard to rid women of their femininity.

Jerome justifies fasting because it deemphasizes women's lustful, Eve-like natures. Specifically, Jerome believes that an excess of food will drive one to unholy distraction, chiefly to sexual sins. He suggests that

when cloyed the mind immediately grows sluggish, and when the ground is watered it puts forth the thorns of lust. If you ever feel the outward man sighing for the flower of youth, and if, as you lie on your couch after a meal, you are excited by the alluring train of sensual desires; then seize the shield of faith, for it alone can quench the fiery darts of the devil. (28)

Not only does Jerome speak directly of the evils of excessive food and drink, he also turns food and drink into spiritual metaphors using words like "watered" and "quench" when referring to temptation. Christ and the Church replace regular food and drink and should be the only sustenance women require.

Jerome often uses this argument that fleshly delights interfere with spiritual life; he extends its

message to all levels of physical existence in order to advocate transcendence. Caroline Walker Bynum, in her book Holy Feast and Holy Fast, claims that:

Behind the Christian praise of fasting as well as a way of moderating lust, cleansing the brain and body, and preparing the soul for God's inspiration lay a...desire to escape the body that dragged the spirit ever downward. (36)

Jerome also supports this notion of transcendence:

There are, in the Bible, countless divine answers condemning gluttony and approving simple food. Care must be taken, therefore, that abstinence may bring back to Paradise those whom satiety once drove out. (Jerome 26)

This statement suggests that when one rejects gluttony, one becomes closer to Paradise, which implies that once one rejects the excesses of the flesh, one transcends the body and becomes closer to God.

Along with food, appearance and dress represent other physical aspects of female life that Jerome polices in order to further control women's sexuality. Jerome wants women to divest themselves of jewels and fine clothing, all signifiers of married status, and transform themselves into modest celibates. He praises women for their mean dress, especially those who adorn themselves with rags in order to prove their modesty, humility, and asceticism before Christ and Jerome (Jerome 36).

However, Jerome creates yet more and more double binds. Ironically, Jerome does not want women to look like men. He needs to have them remain looking like women in order to keep them in a position of inferiority. To be constantly reminded that they are women creates a continual need to look to Jerome for ways to ideally transcend their sex. In fact, he accuses those women who do shave their heads and don male attire of a sort of vain asceticism:

Some women, it is true, disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Others change their garb and assume the mien of men, being ashamed of what they were born to be--women. They cut off their hair and are not ashamed to look like eunuchs. (Jerome 34)

Here Jerome not only tells women to embrace their natural state, but also to be sexual beings. Doesn't he want women to be sexless, like eunuchs? This statement glaringly contradicts most of his others writings when it implies that women should accept their sex. This contradiction obviously represents

Jerome's overbearing use of authority. In one letter, he tells women to renounce their sex in the name of Mary, and in the next, he warns them against the same.

Likewise, he accuses men who grow their hair long and wear women's clothing of the same crime of vain and inappropriate piety:

Avoid men, also, when you see them loaded with chains and wearing their hair long like women, contrary to the apostle's precept, not to speak of beards like those of goats, black cloaks, and bare feet braving the cold. All these things are tokens of the devil. (34)

Men, above all else, should not sacrifice their patriarchal authority for the garb of a woman. Since men have ultimate authority, they should not endanger that authority by mimicking the "weaker" sex. I refer again to those first public executions of homosexuals:

For the first time in history, in 390, the Roman people witnessed the public burning of male prostitutes, dragged from homosexual brothels of Rome. For a male to play a female role, by allowing himself to become the passive partner in a sexual act, had long since been repugnant. (Brown 383)

The year 390 A.D. is right at the height of Jerome's career, so it is not strange that Jerome rejects those men who appear too feminine.

To conclude this section, I would like to give an example of Jerome's handiwork. In his letter to Eustochium, Jerome invokes Eve's presence to totally silence women. He does this by putting himself on both sides of the argument. Not only does he tell women what spiritual questions they should ask, but he also ventriloquizes their answers for them, totally leaving the women out of the conversation:

I would not have you subject to that sentence whereby condemnation has been passed upon mankind. When God says to Eve, "In pain and sorrow thou shalt bring forth children," (Gen. iii. 16) say to yourself, "That is not for me." And when He continues, "Thy desire shall be to her husband," (Gen. iii. 16) say again: "Let her desire be to her husband who has not Christ for her spouse." And when last of all, He says, "Thou shalt surely die," (Gen. ii. 17) once more say "marriage indeed must end in death; but the life on which I have resolved is independent of sex. Let those who are wives keep the place and the time that properly belong to them. For me, virginity is consecrated in the persons of Mary and of Christ. (Jerome 29)

This statement reveals much about Jerome's strategy. He manages to use most strategic, exclusive devices in this single statement.

Jerome exploits the Eve/Mary dichotomy and advocates transcendence. He invokes Eve's image to characterize marriage as a woeful situation, full of death, and also depicts her as a scapegoat for the sinful nature of humanity. This statement also leads women to the counter image of Mary, the paragon of purity, because he advocates virginity instead of marriage. He wants a life "independent of sex" that Mary can supposedly give to women. However, this statement also suggests transcendence not only of Eve but also of the body of Mary, because sex is linked to the body. Throughout his writings, Jerome has proven that Mary still dwells within the corporeal world; she cannot fully transcend her sex. Essentialism once again rears its ugly head.

Jerome also uses a unique dialectic. He ventriloquizes women's answers to spiritual dilemmas. The woman's voice becomes Jerome's; he has managed to completely leave women out of this dialogue. Instead, it is Jerome's voice and ideas reacting to these female spiritual problems. He has totally silenced the women and become the supreme authority. No one speaks but Jerome. No one knows but Jerome. Women become Eve/Mary. Women become Eve. Women cannot become anything positive, so Jerome speaks for them.

IV. Conclusion

As I worked on this project, I could not help thinking about the Catholic Church's recent controversy over women in the priesthood. One of the main arguments against female clergy once again refers back to Genesis and certain Pauline epistles. The Pope, his council, Bishops, priests, laypeople, etc., have all claimed that women are not made in the image of Christ and therefore have no right to preach.

This did not particularly shock me because the Catholic Church has long relied on such traditional rhetoric to ward off any suggestion of progression. In light of this, I realize how easy it is to forget historical context. Even though Catholic scholars agree that the Bible is an historical document composed by men who lived within a certain historical context, no one can make the leap from those scholastic conclusions to practical modern application. The women still cannot speak.

Foucault makes the connection clear once again. He illustrates how each historical period contains its own vast and complicated networks of meaning and that meaning shifts constantly "with the times." The contextual world that produced the Genesis stories has shifted dramatically. The contextual world of Paul's writings has also shifted. The contextual world of Jerome, again, has shifted. All of these shifts involve renetworking relationships of meaning. We do not live in Paul's time or Jerome's time. Sometimes however, I think that we think we still do.

History, to me, is more than just reinventing historical contexts with as much accuracy as possible; it serves an instructional purpose. History teaches us that we have our own context, and though Jerome and Paul have influenced our thinking today, we are not living in their contextual world.

Jerome survives out of his historical context, as do most "great thinkers." Even though his writings confine themselves to a specific time period, I do not think that reading and studying Jerome is problematic. On the contrary, I think it necessary to study Jerome and others like him because it is imperative that we remember the historical contexts of our traditions. Only by recalling them can we

remember to separate those contexts from our own. This is history. We must bridge the gap between scholarship and application. We must use history. We must apply it. We must stop personifying women as Eve. We must stop thinking of Eve as evil. We must remember our context and let the women speak.

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